

Does Coaching Work Without Mentorship in Management Development?

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ABSTRACT

It has been a decade since Karpin highlighted areas that Australian managers needed to improve and identified that they lacked the softer human skills and this needed to be addressed. The terms coaching and mentoring are often synonymous with each other when referring to development programs within organisations. However, the established distinction recognises mentoring as a longer-term guidance and development strategy whereas coaching aims to achieve increased performance in the short-term. Mentoring may occur in a formalised, structured setting or as an informal, unstructured career and personal development arrangement. However, the lack of interventions, based on peer mentoring, may be a contributing factor that restricts the improvement in Australia's managers. One conclusion is that coaching does not work without mentorship in management development.

Keywords: mentoring, mentorship, mentors, coaching, management development, HRD.

INTRODUCTION

The challenge facing organisations as they commence the 21st Century seems to be the lack of 'good' managers. In Australia, a seminal report by Karpin (1995) identified the lack of people skills possessed by Australian managers. The major finding was that the best of Australia's managers and enterprises are equivalent to the best in the world, but there are too few of them - there is a long tail of poor performers trailing out behind the front runners. The problem exists in both the large and small business sectors, although with international pressures and more staff resources, larger businesses have been more active in addressing issues to improve management development.

This paper theoretically assesses whether coaching will work without mentorship in management development. A brief discussion of the Karpin Report (1995) recommendations on management development is the starting point for determining why the use of mentoring, as an action strategy, will aid ongoing management development within organisations. The coaching/mentoring relationship is then examined to determine the difference between the two approaches and whether or not both are common to management development.

OVERVIEW OF THE KARPIN REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Karpin Report (1995) acknowledged that although Australian managers have strengths they also have noticeable weaknesses. The problem arises because skills that are lacking seem to be in those areas crucial for the successful manager and business profile for the 21st century. These areas include

leadership (including teamwork and empowerment); people skills including management of a diverse workforce, strategic skills, a learning focus; and international orientation. Basically, Australian managers are technically sound and have good functional skills (finance and engineering skills) but waiver in the cross-functional, strategic and corporate skill areas that deal with people, teamwork and empowerment (Wawn & Green 1995 cited in Karpin 1995). While there is depth in the skills base, the width is missing. Karpin (1995) identified the following areas needing to be improved as: developing a positive enterprise culture through education and training; upgrading vocational education and training and business support; capitalising on the talents of diversity; achieving best practice management development; and reforming management education.

Karpin (1995) recommended that a high profile national focus on excellence in leadership, management performance, and management development be developed and maintained by establishing an Australian Council for Management Development. The Council would provide a national focus for improving management development and encourage best practice management development in industry and small and medium enterprises. The key objective of the Council would be to promote best practice management development within industry and enterprise and to encourage the development and utilisation of modern learning techniques that encourage flexible and responsive management development. Karpin (1995) also refers to Professor Linda Hill of the Harvard Business School who believes that coaching skills of managers are vital and rewarding managers for coaching subordinates within their organisation is essential to promote this skill. The importance of coaching skills was also acknowledged by the Society of Human Resource Management in Washington and the American Management Association in New York reports that the role of the supervisor has shifted to 'job coach' (Karpin, 1995).

When Karpin (1995) researched management development strategy they found there was little evidence of formal, documented strategies or plans that drove management development activities. They also found that most Australian managers prefer management training to be through short internal or external programs and that mentoring and other forms of training and development are less

used and are less popular. They were concerned the typical junior manager receives less training overall and the training tends to focus only on the technical needs of the job.

Karpin (1995 cited in Maxwell 2003) believes that as Australian organisations successfully develop their management teams, the need for home-grown development programs becomes vital. The Coles Institute, a training operation established for Coles Myer employees, was launched in 1999 as a collaboration between Coles Supermarkets and Deakin University (Tell Me Now, 2003). This is an example of organisations looking to take ownership of their management development training. The Institute delivers customised curricula while maintaining academic standards and award accreditation. Deakin University supervises the institution and offers certificates, competency-based diplomas, and post graduate qualification from graduate certificate to master's degrees.

MENTORING AND COACHING

The terms coaching and mentoring are often synonymous with each other when referring to employee development programs within organisations. Pedersen (2003:1) suggests that limitations exist when trying to define mentoring as it 'tends to be an idiosyncratic term without a clear and concise definition'. It is important therefore, to bring some form of definition to these two terms and unveil some distinctions between them.

Although mentoring is a concept based on the notion that people learn better when they associate with others who have been successful (Nankervis, Compton & Baird, 2005), it is not a new concept. In Homer's 'The Odyssey' (Homer: Revised translation by Rieu, 1991) Odysseus appointed his wise friend the philosopher Mentor as guardian to his son, Telemachus. During Odysseus' absences from Greece, Mentor shepherded Telemachus, being both his guide and teacher. The ancient Greeks realised the importance of providing practical, relevant training. In the 21st Century a popular theory of business mentoring is based on the idea that by associating with senior employees who have achieved success, junior employees will be provided with better learning opportunities (Nankervis et al, 2005).

Management mentoring refers to the relationship between a more experienced manager and a protégé that contributes beneficially to the career development of both (Yukl, 2002). It is an alliance that aids an individual's visibility within the organisation. MacLennan (1995) provides a comprehensive overview by defining mentoring as the process whereby a senior individual makes themselves available to a junior so that they may form a non-specified development relationship; seek information; have a role model to emulate; pick up organisational expectations; learn organisational functions and cultural compliance; be guided through operational, professional or vocational qualifications; receive feedback and appraisal; and learn all relevant information that will enable effective performance.

Mentoring within an organisation may occur in a formalised, structured setting or as an informal, unstructured career and personal development arrangement. Well managed formal mentorship programs tend to be integrated into the culture and operation of the organisation and Mattis (1992 cited in McKenzie 1995) suggest they will have three distinct features. First is executive commitment with backing by all levels of management and those with influence who promote the program. Second, a clear rationale that focuses on measurable goals and outcomes with the aim of providing organisational benefit; and third, accountability that sees outcomes monitored and measured and mentor evaluated. As well as these features, Werner & DeSimone (2006) believe voluntary participation with flexible guidelines is crucial to the success of a formal mentoring program.

Alternatively, informal mentoring happens regularly within all types of organisations, with alliances forming between interested and committed parties looking to improve their professional development with the help of middle and line managers (Nankervis et al, 2005). Most mentoring relationships develop over time on an informal basis and according to Blake-Beard (2002) contrast formal mentor relationships by their tendency to be spontaneously derived. Informal mentoring will usually continue for a longer period than a formalised program with the goals often evolving over time (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Werner & DeSimone (2006) describe coaching as a broad approach to performance management which is also, at the same time, a technique that facilitates it. They liken coaching to leadership, whereas, mentoring is compared to sponsorship. It is the generalised development approach rather than the guidance along the pathway that distinguishes coaching from mentoring. Some authors (Guest, 1999; Parsloe, 1999) highlight that coaching differs from mentoring because of the focus on a process that enables learning and development to occur which results in improved performance.

Amplifying the knowledge and thought processes already possessed by the individual, within a supportive environment where critical thinking skills are challenged and developed, leads to the development of ideas and behaviour. The coach sets a good example of what is needed, and then answers any questions and provides counsel in an attempt to turn a work situation into a learning opportunity (Stone, 2002). In times of change or rapid organisational growth, coaching has been an effective method of staff development (Guest, 1999). Mentoring and coaching is an option for management development but the question is, 'how effective will managers be at developing skills in others that they themselves may be lacking'?

CHANGING MANAGEMENT'S FOCUS

Most management books list planning, organising, leading and controlling as key functions (Bennett, 1991; Robbins et al, 2001; Werner & DeSimone 2006). As economic rationalism sparked rapid changes within the global marketplace, organisational performance and competitiveness became the central focus for management. Longevity in organisations is achieved through the ability to appropriately shift their focus as required in a changing environment. Change programs within organisations are usually management driven and the attitude and focus of management may be a key element of the impact of change. Mostly, policies and practices are based heavily on economics and production and management tend to forget that the organisation is a community of human beings (De Gues 1998). Karpin (1995) identified that Australian managers lacked the softer human skills and this needed to be addressed.

Winterton & Winterton (1999) suggest that management is more than telling people what they must do - it is about understanding why people are motivated and thus aligning culture, systems, structure, and people, toward things that are inherently motivating. This suggests that managers need to know how to as well as what motivates their employees and it is this area that mentoring provides an avenue for management development. The focal point of management is on objects and procedures that produce the goods and services for the organisation (Daft, 2002) - the business efficiency and technical skills as Karpin (1995) calls them. Cross-functional, strategic and corporate skills such as leadership, however, have their base in motivation and inspiration of the organisation's human resources.

This raises the issue that leadership is also a management function that allows the manager to effectively use human resources to produce goods and services. Yet being a manager doesn't automatically mean that they can lead. Managers must develop better relational skills and change their pattern of thinking (Maxwell, 1995). This suggests that those who manage need to be self aware of the potential they possess to affect the operational dynamics of the organisation. Rather than just giving the orders they must become involved in the human relationships within the organisation. It is this area of management development that Karpin (1995) identified as lacking.

Australian research by Carlopio, Andrewartha & Armstrong (1997) identified three aspects of management skills, viz. that management skills are behavioural; they are paradoxical; and they are interrelated. These sets of skills imply they are not personality attributes but can be learned, are varied rather than soft or hard, and were performed interdependently (Carlopio et al, 1997). Therefore, if a manager or individual carrying out the functions of management wishes to do so more effectively, they need to utilise certain behaviours and skills. What is also important is that the research indicates management skills are not necessarily inherent, but can be learned, thereby supporting the concept of mentoring as a management development process.

It is important for managers to have a thorough understanding of the direction their organisation is heading and the role they play in assisting with organisational development (Winterton & Winterton,

1999). They also need to know the organisation's systems and pay heed to the structure and processes in place in order to perform more effectively (Mant, 1997). Potential managers should have a sense and knowledge of strategic thinking because understanding the structures in which they work and exist allows them to willingly and consciously analyse processes to effect change and evolution. Effectively, the manager is there to challenge the status quo in a way that the comfort zone is challenged and subordinates entertain the thought of changing things (Bagshaw & Bagshaw, 1999). The new style of manager is one who can challenge, inspire, innovate, and motivate change by creating a 'we are one' mindset within the organisation (Bagshaw & Bagshaw, 1999). The optimum outcome is to motivate people to achieve or surpass organisational objectives. The creation of a culture in which both individual and organisational needs are met, will in all likelihood, produce a corresponding increase in organisational effectiveness. In essence, managers can be the coach to those they manage; however, there is a role for mentoring in management development to enable them to improve their understanding of both their skills and their role.

MANAGERS AS MENTORS

Whitely & Coetsier (1993) argue that mentoring is based on a number of constructs, mainly primary and secondary, although in more recent times a tertiary construct has emerged. The primary construct is based on mentorship from one senior manager within the organisation and involves a broad range of career assistance and personal support. The secondary construct focuses on external career outcomes and may involve multiple mentors, including peers. The tertiary construct differs from the first two as it is found in the area of organisational behaviour and management and examines mentorship as a trend that impacts the overall operation of the organisation via individuals, groups and structures.

This primary construct of mentoring is relevant to Australian business as ABS statistics show that the majority of employment occurs within medium sized organisations with flat layers of management and a few very senior managers (ABS Small and Medium Enterprises, Business Growth and Performance Survey 1996-97, Cat. No.8141.0). With flatter organisational structures and decreased numbers of managers, it is becoming increasingly important for all individuals to manage themselves more

effectively. Quinn, Faerman, Thompson & McGrath (1996) identified eight managerial roles and their key competencies. One of these roles was mentor, a role in which the one is helpful, open, and fair. Quinn et al (1996) believe that in this role the mentor will listen, support, convey appreciation, and compliment those they are developing. The role for the manager in this is to empower, guide, support and encourage subordinates, themselves, and peers. Mentoring focuses on development through relationship and in its very nature the mentor/mentee relationships provide opportunities for peer guidance via intra and inter organisational management development.

In terms of the tertiary construct, Mant (1997) gave an example of Imo, the Japanese monkey, as a mentoring anecdote. Imo, under observation, discovered that her food tasted better after washing off the sand. Although the other monkeys picked up the idea, it was only when the more powerful alpha male began washing his food that a rapid widespread change occurred. This example portrayed the potential that mentorship possesses to impact on organisational operations. By linking the Imo's within the organisation with the power brokers, ingenuity will take hold at a faster pace, thus improving organisational learning and development. In the overall scheme of things this could be perceived as being merely 'monkey see – monkey do' but it does, however, go deeper than this. Firstly, it concerns words versus works. Kouzes and Posner (1997) suggest that those in leadership should actually do what they say you they will do. One must know what they stand for and put what they say into practice. Smith (1997) reiterates this point and states that actions show employees what is really important; they carry mental yardsticks by which they will measure the differences between what their managers say and do. Again, you must walk the talk. People are concerned with congruity. Secondly this occurs because of perceived power. Kottis (1993) suggests this formal power comes with the position and informal power comes from relationships and interactions. Starkey (1996) believes it is the individual who is often responsible for new knowledge - whether it comes from a researcher, the intuition of a middle manager or a shop worker who draws on their years of experience, the personal knowledge is transferred into organisational knowledge from which all can benefit. The aim of mentoring is to bring about development by taking prior knowledge and experience and imparting it to others. The goal of management development is to improve the manager and in doing

so improve the effectiveness of the organisation. Mentoring is a management development tool that provides an opportunity for strategic links between senior managers and their protégés.

FORMALISING MENTORSHIP

A number of writers (Orpen, 1997; Megginson, 2000; Werner & DeSimone, 2006) highlight the complexities and limitations involved in the formal mentor relationship. These are seen to be limited mentor pairings, the scope and depth of the relationship when mentees are assigned, the lack of creativity in meetings, and the indication that formal mentoring does not yield any more significant outcomes than no mentoring at all. Another point is also raised by Megginson (2000) concerning the mentorship relationship. He proposes that some of the deficiencies associated with mentoring may be attributed to the lack of skills possessed by the mentor or conversely, the unwillingness on the part of the mentor to pass on skills they perceive to be precious and hard earned.

Kram and Bragar (1992), however, believe that there are potential benefits associated with formal mentoring for both the individual and the organisation. They identified three conditions that improved the chances for success. These are a program should be clearly linked to business strategy; core program components should be designed for effectiveness not expediency; and voluntary participation and flexible guidelines are critical.

Gay (1994:2 cited in Pedersen 2003:3) suggests that ‘planned or facilitated mentor programs attempt to capture the positive informal mentoring relationships within an agreed and acceptable framework’. Relationships, according to Mumford (1994 cited in Pedersen 2001) may be far less productive if the learning styles of the mentor and mentee are too dissimilar. The benefit of formal mentoring programs is that the incidence of mentors linking with protégés is increased. When mentors are chosen by or chose a protégé, there is a greater opportunity to enlist the support of someone they feel comfortable with and access to mentoring becomes more equitable, especially for minority groups. Early literature (Wilbur, 1987) claims that there is a direct correlation between mentoring and protégé success.

Any success associated with mentoring, however, will not be universal due to the individual nature of the program. There will always be variation between mentor/protégé pairings and relationship intensities. This is pointed out by Lynch (2002), who stresses that the willingness of the protégé to be proactive by actively enhancing their readiness for a relationship will improve the effectiveness of the program. It is just as important for mentors to be trained and selected for their interpersonal skills and interest in employee development, according to Stone (2002).

CONCLUSION: THE COACHING/MENTORING CONUNDRUM

Several authors (Wilbur, 1987; Pedersen, 2001; Lynch 2002; Stone 2002) suggest a formalised collaborative approach, which includes training and specific goals, will go far in improving the benefits derived from mentoring. Mentoring and coaching are often synonymous with each other when referring to development programs. However, the established distinction recognises mentoring as a longer-term guidance and development strategy whereas coaching aims to achieve increased performance in the short-term. Coaching has become more recognised in recent times, although managers have been doing it quite naturally since taking on that role, according to Redshaw (2000). The effectiveness of coaching, however, is improved when the organisation gives its full support and regards it as a normal part of the management process, with a greater focus on learning and not blame (Redshaw, 2000).

It is this aspect of coaching that lends itself as a management development practice within a mentoring program. Werner & DeSimone (2006) have pointed out the similarities between a manager and a sports coach and this supports Redshaw's statements. Therefore, if coaching is occurring regularly within organisations, perhaps it is the lack of a formal mentoring program that means optimum changes are not happening within management development. It has been a decade since Karpin (1995) highlighted the areas that managers needed to improve. How will the manager learn? Who will teach the coach? The lack of interventions based on peer mentoring may be a contributing factor that restricts the improvement in Australia's managers. One conclusion is that coaching does not work without mentorship in management development.

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